

# COVID-19

## Frequently Asked Questions

Last Updated: March 11, 2020

## **COVID-19 Background and Basic Information**

### **What is novel coronavirus?**

The novel coronavirus, or COVID-19, is a new type of coronavirus that has been identified as the cause of an outbreak of respiratory illness. The outbreak originated in China and has now spread to other countries, including the US.

Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses. A novel coronavirus is a new coronavirus that has not previously been identified. The virus causing COVID-19 is not the same as the coronaviruses that commonly occur among humans and cause mild illness, like the common cold.

The best place to find the most updated information for Mecklenburg County is by visiting our website, MeckNC.gov and following us on social media. If you do not find the information you are looking for on our website, please call 980-314-9400 with questions.

### **Where did COVID-19 come from? What is the source?**

Although this is NOT common, experts believe that COVID-19 started as an animal coronavirus that changed and can now infect people.

The first cases of COVID-19 were linked to a live animal market in China, although this has NOT been confirmed as the source. The virus has now spread to other countries, including the US.

### **How does COVID-19 spread?**

COVID- 19 is spread -

- Mainly person-to-person. Between people who are in close contact with one another (within about 6 feet). Through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes. These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby or possibly be inhaled into the lungs.
- It may be possible that a person can get COVID-19 by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it and then touching their own mouth, nose, or possibly their eyes, but this is not thought to be the main way the virus spreads.

It's important to remember that disease, including COVID-19 can make anyone sick regardless of their race or nationality.

### **Can someone who has had COVID-19 spread the illness to others?**

Yes, the virus that causes COVID-19 is spreading from person-to-person. Someone who is currently sick with COVID-19 can spread the illness to others.

### **\*Can COVID-19 be spread through food?**

Coronaviruses are generally thought to be spread from person-to-person through respiratory droplets. Currently there is no evidence to support transmission of COVID-19 associated with food. Before preparing or eating food it is important to always wash your hands with soap and water for 20 seconds for general food safety. Throughout the day wash your hands after blowing your nose, coughing or sneezing, or going to the bathroom.

### **\*Can COVID-19 be spread through package or products shipped from another country?**

Currently there is no evidence to support transmission of COVID-19 associated with imported goods and there have not been any cases of COVID-19 in the United States associated with imported goods. Information will be provided on the [Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\) website](#) as it becomes available.

### **What are the symptoms of COVID-19?**

COVID-19 causes a respiratory illness that ranges from mild to severe. The most common symptoms are fever, cough, and shortness of breath.

### **\*Who is currently at increased risk of COVID-19?**

The risk of infection depends on exposure. Currently, the risk of COVID-19 is higher for individuals who travel to areas where COVID-19 is known to be spreading in the community or who have contact with an individual who has COVID-19.

It is important to remember that people – including those of Asian descent – who do not live in or have not recently been in an area of ongoing spread of the virus that causes COVID-19, or have not been in contact with a person who is a confirmed or suspected case of COVID-19 are not at greater risk of spreading COVID-19 than other Americans

### **\*Who is at higher risk for complications from COVID-19?**

Older adults and people who have severe chronic medical conditions like heart, lung or kidney disease seem to be at higher risk for more serious COVID-19 illness. If you are at increased risk for COVID-19 complications due to age or because you have a severe underlying medical condition, it is especially important for you to take actions to reduce your risk of exposure. These include:

- [Stock up on supplies](#)
- Take [everyday precautions](#) to keep space between yourself and others
- When you go out in public, keep away from others who are sick, limit close contact and wash your hands often.
- [Avoid crowds](#) as much as possible

### **How is COVID-19 diagnosed?**

There is a specific laboratory test for COVID-19. Call your healthcare professional or the Public Health Department at 980-314-9400 if you feel sick with fever, cough, or difficulty breathing, and have been in close contact with a person known to have COVID-19, or if you live in or have recently traveled from an area with ongoing spread of COVID-19.

### **Is there a treatment for COVID-19?**

Currently, there is no approved treatment for COVID-19. Medical management involves addressing the underlying symptoms and is determined on a case-by-case basis in coordination with an individual's healthcare professional. Not all individuals with COVID-19 will require hospitalization .

There are currently clinical trials in progress to determine if existing medications work for COVID-19, but no additional information is available to date.

**\*Is there a vaccine against COVID-19?**

Currently, there is no vaccine to protect against COVID-19. Public health professionals and scientists are working on developing a vaccine but that will take time before it is available to the public.

## **General Risk Questions**

### **Am I at risk for COVID-19 in North Carolina?**

The current risk to the general public is still low. As of the last update to these questions(March 9, 2020) there have been two cases of COVID-19 identified in North Carolina. Both of these cases were linked to known exposures in other states. There is currently no identified community spread in North Carolina. You can find the most updated information regarding the number of cases, the risk to the public, and ways protect yourself and the community from COVID-19 on the County's website, MeckNC.gov

### **Where have cases of COVID-19 been identified?**

There have been cases of COVID-19 in the U.S. and around the world related to travel and person-to-person spread. The most updated information is available on the County's website, MeckNC.gov or on the CDC's website.

### **How can I protect myself from getting COVID-19?**

To protect yourself from illness, follow the everyday prevention practices.

- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Stay home when you are sick.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces using a regular household cleaning product.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after going to the bathroom; before eating; and after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing.
- If soap and water are not readily available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains 60%–95% alcohol.

### **Should I buy a facemask?**

The CDC does NOT recommend the use of face masks by people who are NOT sick as a way to protect yourself from respiratory illnesses, including COVID-19. You should only wear a mask if a healthcare professional recommends it. A facemask should be used by people who have COVID-19 and are showing symptoms. This is to protect others from the risk of getting ill.

**What should I do if I believe I may have been exposed to someone who has COVID-19?**

If you believe you have had close contact with someone who has COVID-19, please contact the health department at 980-314-9400. If you are experiencing symptoms and need to seek medical attention, please call ahead to a healthcare professional and tell them about your symptoms, potential exposures, and any recent travel before going.

**\*Are there special cleaning supplies that should be used for COVID-19?**

The CDC currently recommends using products that have been registered with the EPA with novel virus claims. These products must be used according to manufacturer's instructions. The full list of products can [be found here](#).

## **Preventing COVID-19 Spread**

**\*What should schools, universities, businesses, and community and faith-based organizations be doing to prepare for and help prevent the spread of COVID-19 in our communities?**

The most current guidance can be found on the [CDC's Preventing COVID-19 Spread in the Communities webpage here.](#)

**\*What are the current recommendations regarding large community events and mass gatherings?**

The most current guidance can be found on the [CDC's Preventing COVID-19 Spread in the Communities webpage here.](#)

**Should businesses recommend facemasks or other protective equipment during travel?**

CDC does not recommend travelers wear facemasks to protect themselves from COVID-19. It is more important that you follow the everyday prevention practices.

- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Stay home when you are sick.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces using a regular household cleaning product.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after going to the bathroom; before eating; and after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing.
- If soap and water are not readily available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains 60%–95% alcohol.

**\*Should I stay home from work or keep my child home from school?**

As always, anyone who is unwell should not be at school or at work.

If you returned from mainland China, Iran, northern Italy or the Republic of Korea in the last 14 days, then you should self-isolate for 14 days.

If you have been in close contact with a confirmed COVID-19 case, you should self-isolate for 14 days from the date of close contact.

If you develop symptoms including fever, coughing and difficulty breathing you should contact your healthcare provider or the Health Department.

## **Travel**

### **\*Where can I find the most current travel recommendations?**

The most current travel recommendations can be found on the [CDC's Coronavirus Disease 2019 Information Travel website here](#).

Please note that these recommendations may change as the situation evolves. Therefore, please continue to check back frequently if you have recent or upcoming travel.

### **\*Should I cancel my trip?**

CDC provides recommendations on postponing or canceling travel. These are called travel notices and are based on the potential health risks involved with traveling to a certain area.

- **Warning Level 3:** CDC recommends travelers avoid all nonessential travel to destinations with level 3 travel notices because of the risk of getting COVID-19.

A Level 3 Warning for the People's Republic of China (this does not include Hong Kong, Macau, or the island of Taiwan), Iran, Italy and South Korea due to widespread community transmission of COVID-19. This means travelers should avoid all nonessential travel to these countries.

- **Alert Level 2:** Because COVID-19 can be more serious in older adults and those with chronic medical conditions, people in these groups should talk to a healthcare provider and consider postponing travel to destinations with level 2 travel notices.

A Level 2 Warning for Japan due to sustained community transmission of COVID-19. This means travelers who are older adults and those with chronic medical conditions should consider postponing nonessential travel.

- **Watch Level 1:** CDC does not recommend canceling or postponing travel to destinations with level 1 travel notices because the risk of COVID-19 is thought to be low.

A Level 1 Watch for Hong Kong due to the outbreak spreading to Hong Kong. Travelers to Hong Kong should be aware of how the virus is spread and take usual precautions/prevention measures (see below).

### **If I am traveling what can I do to protect myself?**

If you travel, take the following routine precautions:

- Avoid contact with sick people.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands.
- Clean your hands often by washing them with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains 60%–95% alcohol. Soap and water should be used if hands are visibly dirty.

- It is especially important to clean hands after going to the bathroom; before eating; and after coughing, sneezing or blowing your nose.

### **Are layovers included in CDC's recommendation to avoid nonessential travel?**

Yes. Layovers at airports in destinations with level 3 travel notices (People's Republic of China (this does not include Hong Kong, Macau, or the island of Taiwan), Iran, Italy and South Korea) are included in CDC's recommendation to avoid travel that is not required. If a layover is unavoidable, CDC recommends that travelers not leave the airport. Travelers with layovers may still be subject to screening and monitoring when entering the United States.

### **What is the risk of getting COVID-19 on an airplane?**

Because of how air flows on an airplane, most viruses and other germs do not spread easily on airplanes. Although the risk of infection on an airplane is low, travelers should try to avoid contact with sick passengers and wash their hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use hand sanitizer that contain 60%–95% alcohol.

### **What happens if there is a sick passenger on a flight?**

Under current federal regulations, pilots must report to CDC all illnesses and deaths before arriving to the United States. If a sick traveler is considered to be a public health risk, CDC works with local and state health departments and international public health agencies to [contact passengers and crew](#) exposed to that sick traveler—according to CDC disease protocols.

### **\*What if I recently traveled to an area where COVID-19 is present and got sick?**

Please refer to the [CDC's COVID-19 Information For Traveler's website here](#) for the most current information.

To slow the spread of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) into the United States, CDC is working with state and local public health partners to implement after-travel health precautions.

If you recently traveled to an area with widespread, ongoing community spread, (Level 3 Travel Health Notice Countries), **stay home for 14 days from the time you left the area and practice social distancing.**

Take these steps to monitor your health and practice social distancing:

- Take your temperature with a thermometer two times a day and monitor for fever. Also watch for cough or trouble breathing.
- Stay home and avoid contact with others. Do not go to work or school for this 14-day period. Discuss your work situation with your employer before returning to work.
- Do not take public transportation, taxis, or ride-shares during the time you are practicing social distancing.
- Avoid crowded places (such as shopping centers and movie theaters) and limit your activities in public.

- Keep your distance from others (about 6 feet or 2 meters).

If you become sick with fever, cough, or difficulty breathing, within 14 days after you left, you should:

- Seek medical advice and call your health care professional or the Public Health Department at 980-314-9400.
- Call ahead before you go to a doctor's office or emergency room. Tell them about your recent travel and your symptoms.
- Avoid contact with others.
- Not travel on public transportation while sick.

For all international travelers, practice the following precautions during and after your travel:

- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or your sleeve (not your hands) when coughing or sneezing.
- Wash hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds to avoid spreading the virus to others.
- Wash your hands with soap and water immediately after coughing, sneezing or blowing your nose.
- If soap and water are not readily available, you can use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains 60%–95% alcohol. Always wash hands with soap and water if hands are visibly dirty.

### **Is it safe to go on a cruise?**

Cruises put large numbers of people, often from countries around the world, in close contact with each other. This can increase the likelihood of spread of viruses, such as the virus that causes COVID-19. You may get sick from close contact with an infected person or by touching contaminated surfaces.

To reduce spread of respiratory viruses, including COVID-19, CDC recommends that crew members and passengers:

- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after going to the bathroom; before eating; and after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing.

- If soap and water are not readily available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains 60%–95% alcohol.
- Stay in your cabin when you are sick and let the onboard medical center know immediately if you develop a fever (100.4°F/38°C or higher), begin to feel feverish, or have other symptoms (such as cough, runny nose, shortness of breath, or sore throat).

**\*Are individuals who develop COVID-19 or who may have been exposed quarantined or isolated?**

Yes, there are recommendations for voluntary and mandatory actions depending on the level of risk to our community. For all individuals, staying home when sick is an important step to limit the spread of illness.

Quarantine means separating a person or group of people who have been exposed to a disease but have not developed symptoms from others who have not been exposed, in order to stop the possible spread of that disease. For COVID-19, the period of quarantine is 14 days. Someone who has been released from COVID-19 quarantine is NOT considered a risk for spreading the virus to others because they have NOT become ill during the 14-day quarantine.

Isolation is reserved for those who are infected and will be required the infection is confirmed. Infected individuals may be isolated in a health care facility or at home (depending on how sick they are) until they are better and will no longer put others at risk.

## **Children**

**Are children more likely to get sick from COVID-19 compared to the general population and how can that be prevented?**

No, there is no evidence that children are more likely to become ill. In fact, most confirmed cases of COVID-19 have occurred in adults. Illness in children has been reported, including in very young children, but based upon past coronavirus outbreaks, illness among children was relatively uncommon. However, as with other respiratory illnesses, certain populations of children may be at increased risk of severe illness if they have other health conditions.

**Do symptoms of COVID-19 differ in children compared with adults?**

Limited reports of children with COVID-19 have described cold-like symptoms, such as fever, runny nose, and cough. Symptoms such as vomiting and diarrhea have been reported in at least one child with COVID-19. These limited reports suggest that children with confirmed COVID-19 have generally been ill with mild symptoms, and severe complications appear to be uncommon.

## **Pregnancy**

### **Are pregnant women more likely to become ill or are at increased risk for severe illness or death with COVID-19 compared to the general public?**

We do not have information about likelihood of illness of pregnant women to COVID-19. Pregnant women experience many changes which may make them more likely to get respiratory infections, including COVID-19. Pregnant women also might be at risk for severe illness and death compared to the general population as observed in cases of other related coronavirus infections and other respiratory infections, such as influenza, during pregnancy.

### **Are pregnant women with COVID-19 at increased risk for adverse pregnancy outcomes?**

We do not have information on adverse pregnancy outcomes in pregnant women with COVID-19. Pregnancy loss, including miscarriage and stillbirth, has been observed in cases of infection with other related during pregnancy. High fevers during the first trimester of pregnancy can increase the risk of certain birth defects.

### **Can pregnant women with COVID-19 pass the virus to their fetus or newborn?**

The virus that causes COVID-19 is thought to spread mainly by close contact with an infected person through respiratory droplets. Whether a pregnant woman with COVID-19 can transmit the virus that causes COVID-19 to her fetus or neonate by other routes (before, during, or after delivery) is still unknown.

### **Are infants born to mothers with COVID-19 during pregnancy at increased risk for adverse outcomes?**

Based on limited case reports, adverse infant outcomes (e.g., preterm birth) have been reported among infants born to mothers positive for COVID-19 during pregnancy. However, it is not clear that these outcomes were related to maternal infection, and at this time the risk of adverse infant outcomes is not known.

### **Is maternal illness with COVID-19 during lactation associated with potential risk to a breastfeeding infant?**

In limited case series reported to date, no evidence of virus has been found in the breast milk of women with COVID-19. No information is available on the spread of the virus that causes COVID-19 through breast milk (i.e., whether the virus is present in the breast milk of an infected woman). Human-to-human spread by close contact with a person with confirmed COVID-19 has been reported and is thought to occur mainly via respiratory droplets produced when a person with infection coughs or sneezes.

## **Animals**

### **What about animals or animal products imported from China?**

CDC does not have any evidence to prove that animals or animal products that come from China pose a risk for spreading COVID-19 in the United States.

### **Should I be concerned about pets or other animals and COVID-19?**

While this virus seems to have come from an animal source, it is now spreading from person-to-person in China. There is no reason to think that any animals including pets in the United States might be a source of illness with this new coronavirus. To date, CDC has not received any reports of pets or other animals becoming sick with COVID-19. At this time, there is no evidence that companion animals including pets can spread COVID-19.

### **Should someone who is sick avoid contact with pets or other animals, if they are sick with COVID-19?**

You should limit contact with pets and other animals while you are sick with COVID-19, just like you would around other people. Although there have not been reports of pets or other animals becoming sick with COVID-19, it is still recommended that people sick with COVID-19 limit contact with animals until more information is known about the virus.

## **Mecklenburg County Public Health Response/Preparedness Efforts**

### **\*What is Mecklenburg County Public Health doing to respond to COVID-19?**

- Since the outbreak was first identified, MCPH has been preparing for potential COVID-19 cases by working with and following guidance from the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (NCDHHS) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). MCPH also continues to work locally with other health departments, first responders, health care providers and community partners to closely monitor COVID-19 and review and update existing emergency response plans.
- Public Health staff is also working diligently to continue to implement the most up to date prevention efforts based on guidance from the CDC and the NC Division of Public Health.

### **\*Where can I find more resources?**

- Additional information and resources (including COVID-19 Poster and a link to this FAQ) is available at [MeckHealthNC.gov](https://meckhealthnc.gov).
- Mecklenburg County Public Health has also established a call line to answer general questions: 980-314-9400.
- Additional information regarding COVID-19 can also be found at the [CDC's website here](https://www.cdc.gov).